



DHS Matters!

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Governor's association \$12,000 grant supports Michigan's Poverty Summit

WASHINGTON—To help reduce the number of children living in poverty and improve the economic outcomes of disadvantaged families, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices on Sept. 25 awarded \$12,000 grants to 10 states to convene Governors Summits on Poverty and Economic Opportunity. The states include Arizona, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, [Michigan](#), Ohio, Vermont, Virginia, Virgin Islands and Wisconsin. Here, the funds will be used to support Michigan's upcoming poverty summit (see sidebar story - Voices for Action 2008 Poverty Summit.)

The summits will provide governors and legislators in the 10 states a springboard for spurring state and local action to reduce poverty. They will help engage and educate new stakeholders and will serve as a forum for key policymakers to hold frank discussions on strategies to mitigate the crippling effects of poverty in their states.

"Many states already have taken action to reduce poverty," said John Thomasian, director of the NGA Center. "Our hope is these summits help governors in their efforts to advance innovative strategies that increase economic opportunities and reduce the devastating effects of poverty on their citizens."

Poverty and economic hardship can result in long-term social and economic costs for children, families, communities and states, but the overall affect can be felt by the economy at large. Poverty has large costs for states and the nation, with childhood poverty estimated to cost the U.S. economy approximately \$500 billion annually.

Living in poverty can also hinder cognitive development, as well as contribute to poor social, emotional and behavioral outcomes for children. Children who grow up poor are likely to earn less as adults, complete fewer years of formal education and face significant health issues.

These trends and high rates of families living without health insurance and facing food and housing insecurities prompted state leaders to examine how to alleviate poverty and support family economic success. The summits are designed to support this goal.

The 10 states were chosen because their proposals demonstrated how their summit will:

- Connect to and build upon existing efforts to reduce poverty.
- Involve key state and local leaders, such as cabinet members, business leaders, legislators, foundation representatives, mayors and other stakeholders.
- Advance a robust statewide agenda designed to promote economic opportunity and reduce poverty.

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Michigan's Poverty Summit -- the Voices for Action 2008 Poverty Summit -- will be held Nov. 13 in Detroit. The DHS, Governor's Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, and Michigan Community Action Agency Association have formed the Voices for Action Network and are sponsoring the summit, which is expected to attract 2,500 people. The goal is to reduce poverty and maximize economic opportunities for all.

The Voices for Action Network is sponsoring the summit to spotlight best practices that are maximizing economic opportunities for low-income Michigan residents and to create regional collaboration to spread these practices across the state. Inspired by the goal set by the Center for American Progress -- to reduce poverty in our nation by half over the next 10 years -- the Voices for Action Network is determined to see similar results here in Michigan.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/poverty

Grants for the summits are made possible with generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and an anonymous donor-advised foundation. For additional information about the NGA Center's work to reduce poverty across the country, visit www.nga.org/center/sewp

Lions Club donates back-to-school supplies for foster children

From James Johnson and Deborah Swasey
Washtenaw DHS, Ypsilanti
SwaseyD@michigan.gov

The Ann Arbor Lions Club filled Washtenaw County DHS's wish by donating 14 backpacks with school supplies and 12 tote bags for foster children. The tote bags were filled with personal hygiene and other products including blankets, flashlights, combs, shampoo, dental necessities and wash cloths.

This is a new program called Kid-Care. The idea came from Roberta Sexton, the Lions district governor, who challenged all clubs in her district to develop a program for children.

James Johnson, Washtenaw DHS community resource coordinator, was delighted with this donation. Donations have been slow because of the economic downturn. Children in foster care were happy to receive the backpacks just in time to begin the new school year.

"It is easy to write a check, but to do something like this is special," John Krienke said. Krienke is a member of Ann Arbor Lions Club.

The club plans to continue the Kid-Care program and assemble and deliver totes once each season. Lisa Langley, Lions Club president, said they are interested in helping out at Thanksgiving as well.



In the photo above right: **James Johnson** (left) of Washtenaw DHS with Ann Arbor Lions Club members **Alison Claerhout** and **John Krienke**. The club donated backpacks full of school supplies for foster children.

Bay DHS employees give \$5,500 to charity the past two years

From Mary Ann Rankey, Community Resource Coordinator
Bay-Arenac DHS
RankeyM@michigan.gov

Bay County DHS employees have shown their generosity the past few years with generous donations to local charities.



Members of the Bay DHS Social Committee (from left): Ron Lemmon, Star Lopez, Terri O'Neil, Amy Majeski, Tina Hausbeck, Lori Zaverucha and Linda Schultz. The group organizes fundraisers and events at the county office to fund local charities and boost worker spirit.

Since February, Bay County DHS employees have donated nearly \$3,000 to various local charities. In 2007, they donated nearly \$2,500.

The county's Social Committee members have combined employee casual days and 50-50 raffles to maximize fundraising opportunities. Each month, they select a different charity. Some of the agencies that have benefited from these charitable donations are the Good Samaritan Rescue Mission, Helen Nickless Free Medical Clinic, Walk for Warmth, and the Bay County Emergency Food Pantry Network.

The Social Committee regularly sponsors breakfasts and lunches for staff in addition to finding ways for employees to donate to local charities. These events help keep everyone's spirits up, even in difficult times.

Bay County DHS employees and the Social Committee members are commended for their generosity and their efforts to make things better for those around them. This is a perfect example of how, together, we can make a difference!

Former CPS worker speaks at community breakfast

By Megan Lavell

Barry County Reminder

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Former Children's Protective Services worker **Matthew Houchlei** spoke Aug. 19 at a community breakfast in Hastings about his work with CPS and children in the community. Houchlei, formerly a CPS worker in Barry County, is a trainer for the DHS Child Welfare Institute. He served in several law enforcement capacities for 27 years before "retiring" to CPS.

"They are some of the toughest jobs out there," said Houchlei of CPS and other positions working with children. He said he conducts forensic interviews with children as part of his job, saying the challenge of his position is to get "clean" information without outside influence.



Matthew Houchlei

In 1998, forensic interviewing became part of Michigan law. Houchlei said CPS workers and law enforcement officials are required to use forensic interviewing for all victims under 18.

"We have a law that says, 'This is how we interview kids,' and the benefit is we will get a clean statement," he said.

Houchlei said it is important for the forensic interview to be child-centered, meaning the child determines the duration and content of the interview. He said it's also important for the interviewer to keep an open mind about the situation and not make assumptions.

There are eight steps to forensic interviews, he explained:

- The first step is to prepare an interview room so the child is comfortable and free of distractions.
- Next is for the interviewer to introduce him/herself.
- The third step is to explain to the child the ground rules of: telling the interviewer they do not know something; telling the interviewer if they do not understand something; correcting the interviewer if s/he is wrong; promising to tell the truth.
- The fourth step is rapport – building and practice interviewing to get the child comfortable talking.
- The fifth step is to introduce the topic the interviewer is there to discuss.
- The sixth step is the free-narrative phrase when the child has the opportunity to talk about whatever they want.
- The seventh step is questioning and clarification when the interviewer asks the child specific questions.
- Last is closing, when the interviewer thanks the child for coming in and ends the conversation on a neutral topic.

Houchlei credits all other members of the staff for the success he has working with CPS. "None of this happens without the other people in the office," he said. "Without each other, it's a lot tougher battle."

■ **Jerome Colwell**, director of Barry-Eaton DHS, submitted this story for publication.



The Alcona-Iosco DHS Social Committee members (from left): **Mark Jordan**, **Mike Peach**, **Joyce Humerickhouse**, **Linda K. Kennedy**, chairperson, and **Jill Matthews**. Not pictured: **Linda Hayes**, **Cindy Smith** and **Christy Herrington**.

Alcona-Iosco committee goals: do good, have fun and boost morale

From Mike Peach, Community Resource Coordinator
Alcona-Iosco County DHS

PeachM@michigan.gov

One purpose of the Alcona-Iosco Social Committee is to plan and implement activities as morale-boosters for the staff. DHS workers, by nature, love to help people so it boosts their morale whenever they can assist those in need. One way Iosco County DHS does this is through the Customer Needs Center. The center is a small storage room stocked with personal care items distributed by workers on an as-needed basis to their clients.

Recent spending restrictions and cost-cutting measures threatened the center. Staff wanted the center to stay active so the committee sponsored a white elephant silent auction to bring in dollars needed to purchase personal and household items. The auction was held in May and it brought in \$134. Since then another \$42 has been raised through casual days. With this funding the center is back in full swing, especially through the efforts of super shopper **Joyce Humerickhouse**, who can, with a fistful of coupons, stretch each dollar to amazing lengths!

The Social Committee has raised more than \$1,150 for the Alzheimer's Foundation, local food banks, troops overseas, the March of Dimes, VFW Relief Fund, Iosco County Child Protection Council, Shelter, Hometown Heroes, Katrina Relief, Child Protection Program and Breast Cancer Awareness.

Date: Aug. 29
To: Daniel Pfaff
Family Independence Manager
Macomb DHS Warren District
Subj: Customer service

I know that you probably get a lot of complaint letters about caseworkers that have poor customer service skills and/or attitudes, so I feel it is only fair to write a letter of commendation when one of your workers exhibits excellent customer service skills and a great positive attitude. I had the pleasure of dealing with Mr. (James) Relford, the caseworker that opened my case, on Aug. 28, 2008. How great it was to be greeted with a smile and treated like a real person instead of like a second-class citizen. I have worked in customer service positions for approximately 20 years. Four of those years I worked as a customer service supervisor and I do not hesitate at all in stating that I would have been extremely proud to have had Mr. Relford on my team. Mr. Relford really deserves a pat on the back for doing such a great job. Perhaps some of your other employees could learn some valuable lessons from him. I am sure everybody would enjoy coming to work if there were more smiles to be seen everyday, and the clients would be much more patient! In closing, allow me to say "Thank You" Mr. Relford for performing your job so professionally.

Michael A. Milez
Warren

■ James Relford is an eligibility specialist that works with medical review team cases in Macomb County.

Date: Aug. 28
To: Allie Campbell
Adult Protective Services Specialist
Eaton DHS, Charlotte

Subj: Reassurance

What a delight it was to meet you. We feel so reassured that we have a compassionate as well as competent contact to help us as we try to care for our son. As you know, our greatest concern is what the future holds for him. I realized we all need a loving and stimulating environment but for someone as vulnerable as he is it seems of even greater importance. Our best wishes on the imminent addition to your family. I am sure your son will be blessed with all the love and care he could want. Thank you for your visit. The enthusiasm you exude as you reach out to help your clients is certainly appreciated.

Marian Remick
Lansing

■ Kathy Mills of Eaton DHS submitted this for publication.

What's up in October?

October is one of the happening-est months of the year with numerous ceremonial events, celebrations, Halloween and the beginning of a new fiscal year. Here's a sample of things happening in October:

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

If you've experienced domestic violence, call the state of Michigan Employee Service Program (ESP) for professional assistance. The ESP is available to all classified state employees and their family members. Counselors can assist by providing education, consultation and facilitate links to appropriate services. Call **800-521-1377**, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To locate resources near your home, go to www.michigan.gov/domesticviolence

National Depression Screening Day Oct. 10

Friday, Oct. 10 is National Depression Screening Day. If you have concerns about the emotional stresses you have encountered, or symptoms that you may be experiencing, please visit the Employee Service Program's free, confidential, interactive depression screening. The screening is anonymous, takes about five minutes to complete, and can be the first step to improved health and well-being. You may log onto www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening (keyword "espmi") to access the screen or call **800-887-5676**. The free screening will address the risks for suicide, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

Food Stamp Challenge Oct. 13-17

The Food Stamp Challenge will take place during Oct. 13-17. During that period, people taking the challenge have pledged to live on the average amount a Food Assistance recipient would receive — \$29.35 for the five-day period, or less than \$6 per day. For more information on the Food Stamp Challenge, go to www.michigan.gov/poverty and click on the link "Food Stamp Challenge" where you can find a pledge form if you want to participate.

Michigan Harvest Gathering

The Food Bank Council of Michigan kicked off the 18th annual campaign Sept. 18. The 2008 Michigan Harvest Gathering runs through Nov. 12. The goal is to raise \$430,000 and 300,000 pounds of food to support the nine regional food banks in Michigan. Regional food banks provide food for agencies such as food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in all of Michigan's 83 counties. You can donate food at Secretary of State offices or where you work if they participate. To find other ways to contribute, go to the Food Bank Council of Michigan Web site at www.fbcmich.org

DHS Matters! is a product of Michigan's Department of Human Services
Ismael Ahmed, Director • Edward Woods III, Director, Office of Communications
Larry VanDeSande, Editor • Submit stories by e-mail to: DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov